

Is it a Petipa dance we are watching?

*To answer this question, I focus on dance movement style in one particular Petipa ballet; but in doing so, I seek to go further and to raise a more fundamental issue, namely, how we should distinguish between classroom technique and art? Petipa dances present a specific example of the problem that arises when choreographers draw on the classroom lexicon, or danse d'école, as a basis for their choreography – something that leads dancers and rehearsal directors to conflate the values of the classroom with those of the dance. Using a dance from *The Sleeping Beauty* (1890) as a framework, I explore the issue of dance art and the question of what, if anything, links performance of classroom technique with performance of the art work?¹*

To discuss dance art in relation to Petipa, I need to identify Petipa's dance movement style.² The *danse d'école* is not art, but Petipa's dance is considered to be so, and that means analysing the ways in which Petipa's choice of movement, use of space and phrasing, is different from that of the classroom; and demonstrating, in consequence, that it should not be performed the same way. A difficulty is that training affects aesthetic values and encourages dancers to move in a specific way (Morris, 2003). But, when the values inherent in the training are alien to those in place when the dance was conceived, performances can reflect more contemporary concerns, potentially leading to a focus on technique rather than on the expressive elements of the dances.

In the following paper, I reflect on how changing approaches to technical training affect past dances, and whether there can be a way of performing that allows earlier choreographic styles to be expressed without curtailing their integrity. This raises questions about dance art

¹ I have chosen Princess Florine's variation from Act III for reasons given later in the article.

² My approach to style is described in my book (2012) *Frederic Ashton's Ballets: Style, Performance, Choreography* and is discussed later in the chapter. It is drawn from Leonard Mayer's concept of style (1989) and from McFee's notion of decipherability, that choreographic style can be discerned by examining the codes and conventions drawn on, or rejected, by the choreographer (1992).

and its relationship to the *danse d'école*, and I explore what it means for a dance to be art. I then examine changes in training, by investigating how changes across different schools; changes in how the lexicon of steps is linked to create different types of phrase; and, crucially, changes in *tempi*, affect performance.³

The final section of the paper deals with performances of Princess Florine's variation from Act III of *The Sleeping Beauty*, where I analyse shifting performance practices through time, and consider the responsibility of the dancer to Petipa.⁴ Although the notion that the choreographer is the arbiter of the dance's performance can be regarded as contentious, I want to examine whether what is performed today – and identified as a Petipa dance – is concerned more with contemporary technical standards than with the expressive elements of his choreography. For this reason, I adopt the view, following the philosopher Graham McFee (2018), that the choreographer is the author of the dance work, is responsible for the work and, consequently, shapes its meaning by selecting which elements to include. According to McFee, the responsibility for the dance work is placed on the choreographer, who contributes the instructions (recipe) for its performance (2018).

Of course, it is also possible for the work to have other meanings not explicitly intended by the choreographer, but, as in my analysis of Frederick Ashton's style (2012), I consider meaning to be related to the chosen steps, the floor patterns, and how the steps are linked – making the dance witty, sad, elegant and so on.

Ballet Technique and the *danse d'école*: separating the values of the classroom from those of the stage

The ballet classroom has a formal code of dance steps (*danse d'école*) comprising a list of ballet steps, with strict, unchanging, instructions for their performance. According to

³ I focus mainly on the Russian Imperial ballet, the Soviet Vaganova training and that of Ninette de Valois in setting up the English style.

⁴ I have chosen this variation for reasons explored later.

Frédéric Pouillaude, the technique (also meaning school or style, 253) has not changed since the beginning of the twentieth century, although the way in which it is performed has changed (250, 2017)⁵. It forms the nucleus of ballet training, although there are also variations in approaches to training (Ryman 1994, 1998, Kersley, 1997, Glasstone, 1999, 2001) and even in terminology, which has changed through time (Noll Hammond, 2012, 36). While the ballet steps and the linked dance phrases (*enchaînements*) form the basis of training, in questioning the notion that training, and its values are fixed, I suggest that which ‘steps’ are included in a training programme and how they are linked to form sequences, change and are dependent on historical, ideological choices.⁶ As a result, the training, or schooling, is an activity which encourages dancers to perform to a specific style, controlling and idealising the body according to the aesthetic choices of the era.

Rhonda Ryman writes that ballet dictionaries are not setting out a fixed account of ballet’s lexicon but ‘documenting today’s usage to provide tangible links between the past and the future, connecting centuries of continuously-evolving dance tradition’ (Ryman, 1998, X). While recognising that terminology changes, she does not develop this to demonstrate its effect. The pedagogue, Richard Glasstone, argues that the function of the teacher is to teach technique - by which he means giving dancers ‘control of whatever [they are] doing’ (1999, 951). Ballet training, the *danse d’école*, he believes, is ‘a highly-structured and carefully-codified method of training professional ballet dancers’ (1999, 1033). He makes the point that movements are combined in a specific way for pedagogic reasons and not as style-based phrases (*enchaînements*). Yet, he does not mention that repetitive use of these *enchaînements* can create an embodied style of moving, nor that they are chosen with regard to

⁵ Pouillaude does not discuss further how it is that the technique can remain unchanged if performances of it have, since the school, style or technique (he uses the former to describe the latter) is dependent on how the movement is executed.

⁶ Many training styles are defined by the name of a pedagogue, and in Cecchetti training or Vaganova training

contemporaneous aesthetic tastes. Consequently, the way in which a performance is judged, can depend on the historical values accorded to classroom technique. The pedagogue and scholar Chris Challis concurs, arguing that technique is not a system of training, but ‘a system of education through which a dancer acquires not only bodily shape and facility but also learns the traditions, conventions and values which underpin the concept of dance being taught,’ at a particular time (1999, 145). This raises the issue of judgements and the criteria that are applied through time - a good technique is not absolute. More importantly, these criteria change when applied to choreographed movement, so we need to separate judgment of classroom technique from performances of dance art, fundamental to which is the issue of artistic worth, which I discuss in due course.

The relationship between training and performance of choreography is omitted from discussions, the assumption being that it is irrelevant, the two are the same. And, evidence from ballet competitions suggests this to be the case. While the profession does not suggest that the *danse d'école* is art, its veneration for technical achievements suggest them to be the supreme balletic value. In her autobiography, Natalia Makarova argued that the ‘classical dances; are fixed, measured for accuracy against a strict academic canon (1980). And at the Vaganova Academy, it is the teaching of classical steps which is deemed more significant than the teaching of choreographed movement (Castillo, 1980). This does indicate a belief in the value of the classroom movement over and above its manifestation as art. In judging dance then, it seems that the ballet profession regards as significant correct performance of the movements of the *danse d'école* and, according to Makarova, these standards are usually transferred to assessments of choreographed dance, linking the values of the classroom to those

of the stage⁷. But if choreographed dance is regarded as art, combining the two sets of values can be problematic as I will discuss later.

The numerous books on ballet written mainly by dancers, teachers and critics also support the view that good dance is accurate performance of the steps of the *danse d'école*. For instance, the tacit suggestion is that ballet is a physical activity, of which the most significant aspect is biomechanical accuracy (Aalten, ed. 2014). Matthew Wyon argues that the focus of the dance class is 'technique enhancement', that dance should be considered 'an equal [with sport] and afforded the same attention to its effect on the body' (in Aalten, 2014, 111). Larry Rhodes praises the exposure to scientific information that has 'changed the ways we can train dancers'. Focusing on the mechanical, he argues that ballet barre work is for discovering balance, improving alignment and articulating the body' (in Aalten, 2014, 142). 'In the centre, we teach the extensive classical vocabulary...' and it is helpful that 'a teacher of anatomy and physiology...has created a few 'dances' that focus on trunk stabilisation, turnout and other aspects...' (142). Throughout Aalten's edited book the emphasis is on achieving strong, injury-free bodies, neither aesthetic values, nor choreography and its performance are mentioned.⁸ Even in the chapter on creativity, the writer claims that the possibility of touching the heart of how and why we dance, cannot be answered but is a feeling in flux. Such books promote ballet's physicality encouraging a belief in technical achievement. As McFee points out 'reasons for justifying our judgement must deal with its artistic value and not be of biomechanical value (1992, 246). Yet the focus is consistently on technical accuracy at the expense of the expressive qualities of the movement. And this idea is further promoted by critics.

⁷ See, for example, the criteria for test classes at any of the professional ballet schools. All require correct execution of the *danse d'école*. Marks are awarded for the accuracy of the performance. Equally, the winners of competitions such as the *Prix de Lausanne* are judged according to their technical ability (see Morris, 2008)

⁸ I am not suggesting that focusing on safe training is wrong, rather that the emphasis has shifted at the expense of dance art.

Admiration for Soviet technique governed values in the 1950s. A discussion between the dance critics, Iris Morley and P.W. Manchester, on the differences between UK and Soviet Union dancers demonstrate a belief in the supremacy of the Soviets. Iris Morley comments that ‘Western dancers seek to acquire expression long before they have acquired strength’, whereas Russian dancers have a ‘good deal more attack than feeling’ (1949, 30). Yet in Russia ‘dancers are allowed a good deal of latitude in the way of feeling and will slightly alter their variations to suit their mood’ (30). The belief that expression is self-expression is challenged by McFee who argues that it lies within the dance and not in the thoughts of the dancer or choreographer (1992, 256). As the discussion continues, it is clear that both critics favour Soviet approaches to training, with its accurate execution of the *danse d’école*. The critic Arnold Haskell, is also concerned with self-expression, arguing that ‘the essence of the dance as part of general education is: (a) its correct relationship to music; (b) the training of the body to move harmoniously and therefore healthily; (c) the combination of a discipline with the chance of self-expression...’ (17). Once again, the emphasis is on the dancer’s physicality and not on her ability to dance with understanding of the choreography. Yet to be fair to Haskell he points out that ‘*ballet technique is a system of physical education that enables the dancer to be expressive in every type of movement*’ (38). So, he acknowledges the importance of expressivity but does not indicate how this should or can be achieved.

Changes in Performance Values and in Choreography

Believed by the Kirov to be the benchmark for all productions of *The Sleeping Beauty*, Konstantin Sergeyev’s 1952 re-working was thought to reflect Soviet values and believed to be an accurate reconstruction (Scholl 2004). Yet changes were made to the variations, in what appears to be an attempt to highlight technique. For instance, the Fairy variations in the

Prologue have been altered to include more spectacular steps.⁹ So, in the Rose Fairy variation¹⁰ (number two), the *posé* onto *pointe* has been replaced by a split *jeté* and the diagonal of liling steps has become more pronounced with a jump each time from *pointe* to *pointe*. This draws attention to the dancer's virtuoso skills, which may have been Sergeyev's intention. As Tim Scholl, a Petipa scholar, indicates, Sergeyev 'often reassigned Petipa's steps' changing the work's appearance. He also altered the 'tableaux, the placement and direction of the movement on stage, the musical accents, the plastique of the individual roles [and] the dance combinations' (2004, 126). But, as Scholl notes 'in obliterating the pantomime, he created a 'misalliance of movement to music' (127). Doug Fullington, supports this point. He argues that in the 1999 new/old Russian production, which used the Stepanov notation, the rehearsal director was unsure how to fit the movement to the music, writing that a case in point is evident in Princess Florine's variation:

Tchaikovsky's melodies often begin midway through a bar of music, but give the impression of beginning on the downbeat of the bar. Bars of choreographic notations sometimes follow the aural impression of the music, rather than the actual written counts. Here, by waiting until the beginning of the next bar of music to begin, the connecting combination, the alignment of movement and music is skewed.

2000, 86

In Sergeyev's production the work's meaning was also affected and, in Scholl's opinion, changed the spirit of the ballet. Dance directors often require changes to be made to the choreography, adjusting the dances by adding spectacular movements to replace the earlier material.¹¹ In 2000, writing in appreciation of Konstantin Sergeyev's 1952 *Sleeping Beauty*, the Soviet critic, Vadim Gaevsky, mentioned that 'it wasn't possible to join the stylistic norms

⁹ Cristina Ezrahi mentions that Sergeyev's priorities lay in 'nurturing impeccably high standards of academic classical dance and in preserving the Kirov's purity of style.' (2012, 79)

¹⁰ The name varies amongst different productions. In the 1890 version this variation was also termed *Coulante* and/ or *Fleur de farine*.

¹¹ In the Fairies' variations in the Paris Opera's version of *The Sleeping Beauty*, the dances have been changed, so that phrases, which in the earlier Royal Ballet version have simple repeats, have been complicated with added different phrases. This at times makes the dances unmusical particularly in the Breadcrumb fairy's variation.

of the late Petipa period to the stylistic norms of the Soviet ballet (in Scholl, 129). Had performance style altered significantly or is he suggesting that technical values were now different? Certainly in 1952 the choreography appears to have been changed to reflect Soviet technical achievements.

When in 1999, Sergei Vikharev decided to restage Petipa's choreography for *The Sleeping Beauty* by returning to the notation scores compiled by Nicholas Sergeyev, the subsequent production met with outrage (Scholl, 2004). It challenged the long-held belief in Soviet ballet's authenticity as guardians of nineteenth century ballet. As Anna Pakes notes, (quoting Scholl, 2004, 153), the production proved contentious because the 'new-old choreographic "text" challenged an embodied tradition used to a version of the ballet handed down from dancer to dancer through the Mariinsky coaching system' (2017, 88). Politically, this was not acceptable to Russian critics and audiences, let alone dancers who subsequently performed the dances according to their contemporary technique; thus, ignoring the style.¹²

Altering choreography in this way can affect the work's structure which in Petipa's case was carefully planned.¹³ Equally, it demonstrates the difficulty of reverting to the nineteenth century version. But, if the steps, structure and musicality are altered, what if anything is left of Petipa's work? And is it still dance art?

Dance Art

To explore Petipa's dance as art, I draw on the work of philosophers, Noel Carroll (2010) Arthur Danto (1981) and Graham McFee. These are chosen for their extensive accounts of art, aesthetics and dance. McFee claims that dances are abstract objects and, as works of performing art, multiple art works. Dance works are '*performables*', by which he means that 'the very same work can be re-performed on another occasion, despite the inevitable

¹² This was obvious to me when I saw the production in London in 2000.

¹³ I discuss this later.

differences between such performances...’ (2018, 5) So alterations in the choreography, and presumably, performance, do not affect the abstract object.¹⁴ Yet, for us to see the work as Petipa’s, and thus as an art work, the performance has to reflect meaning. Quoting Arthur Danto, McFee argues that for something to qualify as a work of art, it has ‘to be *about* something and *to embody its meaning*’... (2018, 7). If the performance fails to address the work’s meaning and presents only its technical features can the work still be considered to be art and consequently, in this case, Petipa’s choreography?

So, when performances are taken into account, the following issues need addressing: firstly, even if the choreographed dance appears to be indistinguishable from classroom movement, the dance is not that movement, it is an art work and thus has different meanings¹⁵; secondly, while classroom movement is principally designed to train bodies, the choreographed dance is not. Thirdly, while the *danse d’école* is not art, the choreographed dance is and should not be misperceived as merely classroom steps. In other words, regarding it as art involves interpreting it in terms of artistic concepts. What are artistic concepts and how is our judgement of the dance performance altered if framed as art? How do these values differ from those used to appraise classroom technique?

Noel Carroll argues that ‘art deploys a wide range of concepts that make the activities of art making, art appreciation, art history and art criticism possible.’ (2010,20). Central to art practice is the question “What is art?” Carroll answers this by examining a range of historical periods, demonstrating that art cannot be simply classified, in other words there can be no necessary features shared by all art work; art has no necessary conditions. His contribution to the discussion is to argue that in order to ‘corroborate that something is an art work, we standardly mobilise narrative explanation of how the work emerged coherently from

¹⁴ Interpreting the dance as an abstract object is only one way of examining the dance’s existence and other philosophers question this approach, though a discussion of ontology is beyond the scope of this article.

¹⁵ The question of art work is discussed in due course.

recognised artistic modes of thinking, acting, composing, decision-making etc. already familiar to the practice' (50). So for *The Sleeping Beauty* we know that Petipa created the dances from the current vocabulary of steps, engaging with the composer, Tchaikovsky, by outlining the musical rhythm and duration of each variation and section, within the confines of the narrative devised by Ivan Vsevolozhsky (Meisner, 2019, 221).

McFee considers that to apply artistic concepts to something that is not art, like the *danse d'école*, is inappropriate. The *danse d'école* is not an intentional art object, created by an individual and its function is bodily training. It is a set of movements, handed down both verbally and selected randomly from traditional sources, and pedagogues, so not drawn from artistic codes and conventions. According to McFee, we can only take an artistic interest in a work that is decipherable, meaning that it is only in works made by choreographers (artists) that we can have any knowledge of the canons they apply. Drawing on Richard Wollheim (1979) McFee notes that 'decipherability is a pre-condition of artistic interest'. (199, 1992). What this means is that we value art works by understanding how artists have built on, or rejected past codes, or even invented new approaches to their work. Expanding the point, he suggests that 'decipherability is also a pre-condition of expressiveness' (200). Interpreting a work depends on being able to decipher its expressive qualities and this can only be done if we can draw on the concepts informing the work. This accords with Carroll's narrative explanation of how the work emerged. So, for example, understanding Michel Fokine's *Les sylphides* (1909) according to artistic concepts depends on knowing that he rejected Petipa's conventions. Contextually, we need to be aware of the nineteenth century ballets that draw on supernatural themes, as well as the work of Isadora Duncan and the stylistic concepts that inform the movement known as *Art Nouveau*. *Les sylphides*' meanings can be linked to all these aesthetic principles, so, our understanding of a work can be helped by knowing about the

influence of one work on another. It can (should?) also help to inform performances of that work.

As dance art, the choreography is understood within a different framework to the *danse d'école*, and within an artistic context. Aesthetic standards such as issues of schooling that are applied to classroom movement should not be used as a way of appreciating or judging the performance of choreographed dance. This point is elucidated by Arthur Danto's argument which posits that even if the art work (as in the case of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Box*, 1964) appears to be identical to the (mere) real thing, it is not the same because placing it within an artistic context alters the meaning (1981). In other words, Warhol's art work is intentional and can be appreciated by examining which codes and conventions he rejected or used. It is appropriate to ask what Warhol's work means because applying these notions to an actual cardboard Brillo box makes no sense. Danto is concerned with 'confusable counterparts' (in McFee, 2018, 8). Recognising the difference between Warhol's *Brillo Box* and a real one means that such terms as: 'Elegant... Poised. Clumsy. Natural. Balanced... etc'. can only be applied to the art work and not to the real thing (2018, 8). This raises the question about the steps of the *danse d'école*, and what values we should apply to them once they are transposed into the art work (the choreography). So, for example, Petipa *jetés* or *pirouettes* should be performed expressively, with regard to the qualitative aspects of the movement and aesthetic values of the choreographer's artistic context. Because dancers (and rehearsal directors) often misinterpret choreography, performing it as the *danse d'école*, it raises the issue as to whether their performances are of Petipa's work. Indeed, Mona Inglesby mentions that Petipa's works were described to her as being 'just a yardstick of technical ability', and she confirmed that dancers also reflected that view (2008, 6).

Significant properties

We do not have enough information about the early performances of *The Sleeping Beauty* to guide us and the notation score that exists, (in Stepanov notation) was not made by Petipa, written some thirteen years after the opening performance (Fullington, 2000).¹⁶ This lapse in time may be unimportant if performance traditions had changed little in the ensuing years and we are led to believe that the score is an accurate, though incomplete, version of, at least, the steps and floor patterns (Scholl 2004) besides, we do not have any recordings of performances from the 1890s. In any case, as Pakes argues, copying a performance from a film is questionable as a way of re-instancing choreography, since we do not necessarily know which properties of the filmed dance are choreographically important (2017, 91).

So perhaps we should now consider the properties which, according to Julia Beauquel, have ‘physical, spatial, formal, structural and contextual [cognitive, intentional, historical, cultural] characteristics’ (2013, 180-1). She argues that there is a close relation between the corporeal, contextual and aesthetic properties and, since physical and expressive properties work together, all should be included in any analysis of a dance, (167). In other words, the technique, style and meaning are not separate from each other (171). Dance, she claims, cannot be reduced merely to physical movements and is made of corporeal, intentional actions, possessing aesthetic properties. These properties are not merely subjectively perceived but are real and evident in the dance (180-1). Our perception of these properties is partially dependent on a knowledgeable performer. Quoting Nelson Goodman who explains that ‘exemplification of a property P means that P is both instantiated and referred to (Goodman 1976, 170-183), Beauquel notes that ‘a dance exemplifies lightness and joy when it possesses *and* draws attention to these properties’ (Beauquel, 178). Bearing this in mind, it is the way in which the dancer draws our attention to the properties that is significant.

¹⁶ It was this score, interpreted by Nicholas Sergeyev, who compiled it, that was the basis of the Vic-Wells’s performance in 1939.

So, for example, when Petipa choreographed the dance for Princess Florine, he used crisp, darting movements that shoot directly into the space. The steps are actually action commands, verbs: *fouetter* (to whip) *piquer* (to prick), *jeter* (to throw) *courir* (to run) *échapper* (to escape). Being French, Petipa would have understood these terms as verbs denoting actions, so his particular choices are intentional and contribute to the meaning.

Another important nineteenth century teacher Enrico Cecchetti, who also danced in *The Sleeping Beauty*, was highly influential for Petipa's work and also on how it was performed. The dancer, Olga Preobrazhenskaya, remembered how Cecchetti emphasised the precise aim of each movement and stressed that 'every detail must be exactly attuned to its function' (Hall and Roné 1978, 26). In other words, the dynamic actions of the steps need to be recognised. These effort elements create light and shade and contribute to the meaning of the dance as a lively, vivacious celebration of Aurora's wedding and of Florine's love for the Blue Bird.¹⁷ Consequently, the performance should respond to these commands creating a sharp, speedy, spritely dance and the dancer needs to draw our attention to these qualities rather than to the technique. Whether the legs are flat turned-out or high above the shoulder does not matter. But if the dance is to be perceived as by Petipa, the dynamic commands of the steps need to be respected. This also means paying attention to the brisk musical tempo, since this encourages such qualities.

Today's performances are notably slower than those of earlier dancers, by as much as forty seconds. Is this because the training has changed, and the dynamic actions of the steps are rejected in favour of placing and position or is it because the dancer believes that portrayal of 'correct, contemporary' technique is more important than respecting the expressive qualities of the choreography? As a result of these changes, performance of the choreography is significantly altered because these significant, expressive properties, seem to be absent. McFee

¹⁷ The tale is taken from a fairy tale by Madame d'Aulnoy written in 1697.

notes that ‘criticism that ballet was too ‘technical’ at some historical periods really described a decline in the technique, such that it became a matter of the ability to perform certain ‘circus tricks’...and hence, lost its connections with expressiveness’ (1992, 206). The point is that if the dancer draws attention to the technique as opposed to the expressive elements, the art form is in decline. So what aspects of Petipa’s style should inform the dances?

Petipa Style

The concept of style used here is drawn from a number of sources, though, I am only dealing with dance movement and not the complete work. Leonard Meyer described style as a replication of patterning resulting from the choices made by choreographers and pedagogues constrained by the cultural codes and traditions of the art form at a particular time (Meyer, 1989). On this basis, Petipa’s style can be regarded as the recurring step choices made at a time when certain qualities were valued. Such as an emphasis on light buoyant jumps and beaten steps as opposed to split legs or 180-degree turnout. Philosophers Adina Armelagos and Mary Sirridge (1984) argue that choreographic style comes from movement choices made by a choreographer coupled with the dancer’s training. Armelagos and Sirridge consider technique as genre based, as with Graham or Cunningham, but their argument also supports the point that training is historical and varies according to School and place.

Petipa drew on classroom practice and we know, from Nicholas Legat (1931), that he frequently observed the classes taught by the Swedish ballet master Christian Johansson who was heavily influenced by Auguste Bournonville. Legat claims that Petipa frequently used Johansson’ dance phrases (*enchaînements*) in his choreography and so part of that Danish style feeds the performance practice of the era. Johansson emphasised footwork, small beaten jumps and jumps from one foot to one foot as well as using restricted, intricate floor patterns. Recent filmed evidence of Bournonville’s choreographic (now training) style, demonstrates the stylistic features of the Bournonville classroom, its *enchaînements* drawn from his

choreographed dances (Flindt, 2005). Analysis of Petipa's dances (in the Royal Ballet version) demonstrates his choice of these steps and, as with Bournonville's choreography, the floor patterns in *The Sleeping Beauty* are compact and intricate, moving back and forth. In the Fairy variations from the Prologue, the dancers never move in direct diagonals, their patterns broken up, in some with short breaks to accomplish a balanced *arabesque* or quick *rond de jambe*, and in others the dancer travels forward and backwards on the same line. Equally, with Princess Florine's variation, the dancer performs on the spot, while slightly moving forward and then in a brief diagonal to stage left before moving from side to side and then to upstage left for the final longer diagonal. This gives the dance exuberance, a quality masked when the tempo is diminished.

The Danish step combinations are echoed in those of Petipa. Bournonville frequently combined turns and jumps, not isolated turns with a preparation, but turns that become part of the phrase. The effect is to conceal virtuoso movement, promote light and shade and draw attention to expression rather than technical capacity (2005).¹⁸ In Petipa dances, a sharp *piqué* travelling upstage is interrupted by a sudden balance and rotation of the lower leg (double *rond de jambe en l'air*) or by a swift *couru* forward, piercing hops on pointe by a softer balance into *arabesque*. If the phrase is perceived in terms of artistic concepts the performance should draw attention to this light and shade, concentrating on the expressive features.

Using the dances as a platform for technical display is regarded as detrimental to the choreography by writers and critics of Petipa's work (Meisner, 2019). Though there is little analysis of Petipa's choreographic style, neither by contemporaneous dance critics or later academics like Roland John Wiley¹⁹ or even Scholl, we can still gain some insight by examining the training of the era and as Noll Hammond points out, moving with speed and

¹⁸ Most of the Bournonville technical exercises were drawn from his dances and there is evidence of the integrated *pirouette* in the *pas de six* from Act III of *Napoli* (1842).

¹⁹ Choreomusical aspects are discussed by Wiley.

lightness had long been a hallmark of the good dancer' (2012, 40). She argues that while nomenclature of the steps varied, emphasis on speed, buoyancy and intricate beats remained through the nineteenth century, though the leg height did not move above ninety degrees. Classes, such as those documented by Léopold Adice, emphasised exercises to strengthen the feet, with numerous repetitions of *battements tendus*, *battements glissés* and *frappés*. This would have enabled dancers to rise on pointe and to jump with speed and lightness (Noll Hammond, 1995).

The dance scholar, Cyril Beaumont, who watched rehearsals and performances of Serge Diaghilev's 1921 presentation of *The Sleeping Beauty*, does mention the style and it is worth quoting his comments in full here:

Petipa's classical numbers are most difficult to dance properly. I am not thinking primarily of their technical difficulty, often considerable, because that is only the framework of the dance, but of the *manner* in which they are danced. Those dances are full of subtleties of choreographic colour, a slow phrase contrasted with a quick one, the timing of a particular movement which must be held so long and not a moment longer, the carriage of the body, the poise of the head, the very control of the features- it is the attention paid to such details as these which makes the dance a work of art and not a mere combination of steps and *ports de bras*. (1975, 277)

The critic André Levinson wrote extensively about the 'classical ballet', describing it as a 'transcendental language, charged with spirituality and mystery' (in Accocela, Joan and Lynn Garafola, eds. 1993, 269). Inspired to write about dance after seeing *The Sleeping Beauty* aged four in St Petersburg, he championed Petipa, Marie Taglioni and Anna Pavlova amongst others. Above all, it was *The Sleeping Beauty* which he revered, writing that 'The classical dance alone, with its ideal essence, its system of formulae and symbols, independent of sentiment and aloof from realism, constituted a common unchanging element throughout [the Revolution] governed by constant laws' (1923, 6). At a time when abstraction was valued as an artistic ideal, Levinson promoted the 'classic dance' as a pure art form, epitomised in *The Sleeping Beauty*. Writing on the 1922 version, *The Sleeping Princess*, mounted by the Ballets

Russes, he praises Petipa's use of the *corps de ballet* and his structuring of the *pas de deux*. But beyond these comments, it is difficult to tease out his understanding of the choreographic style, neither does he elaborate on this elsewhere.

More thought-provoking is the writing of Fedor Lopukhov whose discussion of Petipa's *La bayadère*, provides a rare analysis of 'The Kingdom of the Shades (2002, 173-185). Although not *the Sleeping Beauty*, his detailed discussion is unusual and gives a valuable analysis of choreographic style. He focuses on the structure and Petipa's motif development, demonstrating how the range of steps was deliberately limited, though repeated in ingenious ways. Lopukhov points out that the introductory *arabesque* of the corps de ballet remains a theme throughout the work. In the ballerina's variation with the scarf, he admires Petipa's phrase of *arabesque* turns which shift between half, quarter and complete turns. This, he argues, retains the fluidity of the phrase. When the work was restaged in the Soviet Union in 1941, these were transformed into *attitude* turns and converted into whole turns, which, according to Lopukhov 'inflict[s] severe damage upon Petipa's whole design' (182). He argues that this disrupts the sense of calm and 'interferes with the lyrical-romantic tone of the work' (182). By updating and adding more bravura movements to the dance, technique is given priority.

From the foregoing analysis, Petipa dance movement style emerges as a form which focuses on quick, spritely movements, performed within an intricate space promoting buoyancy, lightness and speed. To perform this movement, the dancer needs a training that draws attention to such qualities and steps.

Schooling and different training systems

Ballet training encourages dancers to move according to the values inherent in the system. Dancers become the choreographic material and the ways in which they dance feeds

the choreographer's style. Susceptible to historical, aesthetic values, technical values change to the extent that, in late-nineteenth-century Russia, phrases from choreographed dances were used as part of centre practice. This may have shifted the emphasis from technical correctness to the more expressive elements of the dances. Tamara Karsavina remembers how [Pavel] 'Guerdt (sic) worked the steps into short consecutive dances. Often, he reconstructed the parts of old ballets...' and in that way, performance traditions from the past survived (1950, 75)²⁰.

Later in the Soviet Union the teacher Agrippina Vaganova re-codified the training, focusing on exercises rather than dances (1934)²¹. She conceived of professional training as an eight-year plan developed between the ages of ten and eighteen. Within this framework, she treated each step as an isolated movement, so that each was accurately performed with an emphasis on 'correct' positions, finishing and starting in a precise position (usually fifth) and aiming at accurate schooling. The effect is that one step cannot merge with the next, as some choreographers demand, and it involves diminishing the tempo to effect a precise finish. Consequently, schooling became more important than choreography to the extent that when Rudolph Nureyev, first encountered Frederick Ashton's work, he complained that he was handicapped because he wanted to protect his school, in an attempt to keep his style undiluted (Kavanagh, 1996, 479).

Vaganova's approach contrasts with that of Ninette de Valois who was self-consciously forming an English ballet style (1937, 231). At a time when London had been flooded with Russian émigré teachers, with whom she had studied, she notes that the Russian approach to the *danse d'école* was derived from the Franco-Italian school. But she believed it to be at least three-quarters French, in that it differs from the Cecchetti method in its lack of routine. This means that the student is continually challenged intellectually, leading to a more

²⁰ In the 1950 edition of *Theatre Street*, Karsavina spells the name as above but later editions have the more conventional Gerdt.

²¹ This book was not published in English until 1946

spontaneous performance (235). The Russian School emphasises ‘freedom and lethargic movement...stresses elevation and elasticity’ and when used for the model dancer creates lyricism (238). Yet, it fails to strengthen the dancer, so an ideal training also needs the speed and precision of the Italian School.

Stylistically, the Russian School prioritised extended line over Italian roundness. A hallmark of the ‘Italian’ school is the flexed knee, which leads to an increase in ‘speed and brilliance’ (241). In beaten allegro, by crossing at the ankles, the dancer stretches the feet with more force increasing the strength and brilliance of footwork. De Valois chose not to clash with tradition but to select ‘the best of the past...coupled with scope and freedom for the best of the present to be encouraged’ (252). Her own syllabus stressed speed, shifting *épaulement* and intricate *enchaînements* emphasising foot work and rapid changes of weight and direction. It was this style that informed the performances of the Sadler’s Wells ballet in *The Sleeping Beauty* in 1946, derived from Nicolas Sergeyev’s 1939 production for the Vic-Wells Ballet.

Her class syllabus, presented as part of a Summer school in 1947, embraced multiple changes of direction even in the *barre* work. So a *battement tendu* might move, for instance, to *croisé*, *enface*, *effacé*, *écarté*, or *à la seconde*. Thus, an emphasis on *épaulement*, speed and swift thinking is in marked contrast to the careful placing and slow execution recommended by Vaganova’s Soviet approach. De Valois’s dance phrases in the centre also reflect this pace and dancers were encouraged to highlight footwork, *batterie* and speed, rather than excessive turnout or ‘six-o-clock’ legs. In fact, de Valois particularly, abhorred legs that rose above ear height, considering this to be weakening, unattractive, and an impediment to swift movement.²² It was this stylistic approach that informed the Royal Ballet School, until in the 1980s, a Vaganova style training was introduced. Today’s School claims to have reverted to de Valois’s

²² This was something she stressed in her classes, which I attended as a pupil at the RBS.

system but it is differently taught, and the values are affected by global tastes, closer to those of the Vaganova school.

These 1940 values are clearly at odds with those of today. But de Valois's training was eclectic, coming from the French teacher Edouard Espinosa, Nicholas Legat's Russian Imperial ballet approach, and from the pedagogic values of Cecchetti. In creating the 'English style' she also drew on British traditional dances, chosen so that an English school would reflect the characteristics of its dance nationality, which, she alleged, revolved around speed, and complexity.²³ When she devised her approach to an English school, it was from these that she drew.

Besides, she did not have access to Vaganova's methods, only encountering these when she visited the Soviet Union in 1957. Writing after her visit, she commented on the weak feet of the students and the lack of *petite batterie* at the Bolshoi school (1977, 148), greatly preferring the Kirov, which she alleged had better schooling (154).

Approaches to training vary but are peripatetic, moving with dancers and choreographers. Late Russian Imperial ballet training was embraced by de Valois and incorporated into the English style. With its emphasis on speed, complexity and fluent upper bodies, it is possibly closer to the values of that era. We cannot be absolutely sure but as the examination of the following variation suggests, this training method accommodates the variation's style.

Performances of Princess Florine's Variation

There follows a discussion of three performances of Princess Florine's dance from Act III of *The Sleeping Beauty*. I have chosen this because I learnt the dance from de Valois as a student in her class, because I also remember Antoinette Sibley performing the dance, and I

²³ I use the term English School because it is the term used by de Valois.

also saw the Kirov version of the new/old *Sleeping Beauty* when they performed it in London in 2000. Apart from the 1930s version, the other YouTube films accord with my memory of those performances.

The first is danced by Tatiana Riabouchinska, in an incomplete YouTube clip from the 1930s, dancing with the Original Ballet Russe.²⁴ We do not know who filmed the dance or from what angle it was taken. Her performance is clipped and fast so that it makes us conscious of the relentless, even restless, quality of the movement. Her limbs are arbitrarily placed, in other words, they fly out into the space and are loosely-positioned. Never clearly defined, they do not reach strong, articulate positions. The performance does not expose light and shade but it does make us see the crisp, piercing, joyful characteristics of the dance. There are no carefully posed shapes or balances and the dancer is concerned to exemplify lightness and intensity. The dance becomes exciting, swift and exuberant and we are unaware of its technical virtuosity. Noted for her speed and lightness, she was described by one critic as ‘an embodied scherzo’ another, André Levinson, wrote of her that ‘...As soon as she touches the ground like after a fantastic flight, she parts again like an arrow, sparkling and minute like a humming bird.’ (Garcia-Márquez, in Bremser, 1993, 1199). Her teachers came from the Imperial Ballet, so she probably embodied some of those late nineteenth century performance values.

In the next version, performed by Antoinette Sibley with the Royal Ballet in 1963, we notice different elements. For instance, the speed is slightly slower forty-four seconds in contrast to forty but the performance is light and joyful as well as being sharp with considerable light and shade. The *piqué* into second *en l’air* is followed by a sharp *fouetté* into a more sustained *arabesque*, accompanied by light *petits jetés* and these qualities are echoed later in the *échappé* section. Here the feet break free from each other, so that the quality is explosive

²⁴ The date of the film is unclear but it is probably the 1930s as Riabouchinska left that company in 1942. The information on the clip is limited.

and the end position, *à la seconde*, is accentuated. This is followed by hops on pointe which end in a held *arabesque*. Each time she takes an *arabesque*, her head is thrown back, as though she longs to fly and, like Riabouchinska, her arms are flung into the space, stressing the final position. It creates an expression of elation and delight. The dance is fast, emphatic and exuberant and we are again unaware of technique. But it is Sibley's use of the head and eye focus that draws attention to these qualities and this characteristic head movement and *épaulement* is part of the contemporary performance tradition, fed by her particular training.²⁵ Described as the 'epitome of classical English ballet style' by Clement Crisp, she also worked for several months with Tamara Karsavina and believes that 'a little bit of her genius rubbed off' on her (Dodge, 2014). Further from Petipa but seeming to embrace the values of the Imperial Ballet, Sibley still embodies something of that performance style. Her teachers, Winifred Edwards, Pamela May and Harold Turner had experienced not only the Imperial ballet style but also Nicholas Sergeyev's coaching, so her performance, might just display evidence of that.²⁶

I now turn to the more recent Russian version. I watched several but discuss the performance of Yulia Stepanova on a You Tube version from (possibly) 2016. The variation lasts one minute and eight seconds, twenty-four more than Sibley's, and, consequently, is a more languid and statelier affair. Stepanova emphasises shape, a held *arabesque* and flat turned-out *retirés*. We are made conscious of the dancer's excellent technique through a balanced *retiré* before moving into, and posing briefly in, *arabesque* in the *échappé* section. The dance has little dynamic variation since the *petits jetés* in the opening phrases have a similar stately quality to that of the *arabesque* section. Every movement is 'perfectly' placed

²⁵ Because Sibley was trained in the Sadler's Wells school, not long after the 1946 performance of *The Sleeping Beauty*, I am assuming that the performance style taught by Nicholas Sergeyev and reinforced through de Valois's training syllabus was still taught.

²⁶ Winifred Edwards as far as I know did not work with Sergeyev but she spent several years in Pavlova's company and also trained with Ivan Clustine.

and the arms too end in precise *danse d'école* positions (according to Vaganova training). In a Maryinsky, online, commentary she was described thus: 'Stepanova's dance is notable for the old style, and today rare, Vaganova school with its inherent beauty and cantilena-like movements, ports-de-bras and the refinement of the poses.' These qualities are admirable, but can they be those required in this dance? Watching it, the observer is drawn more to her correct and strong technique rather than to the dance's expressive features and the action commands of the steps are missing, diminishing Petipa's choice of movements. So, is it still a performance of a Petipa dance?

Conclusion

I have discussed some of the performance issues regarding the ballet *Sleeping Beauty* and adopted McFee's suggestion that for a dance to be art, it must be considered under artistic concepts. Using Danto's approach to confusable art works, I propose, that despite appearing similar, when the *danse d'école* is transformed into a choreographed dance work its meaning is changed and has to be interrogated according to artistic principles. So despite the profession's covert belief in the supremacy of the *danse d'école*, its function is training. It lacks expressive properties, does not have an artistic context and, as a result, has to be valued according to biomechanical principles and not artistic ones.²⁷ I then considered aspects of Petipa's style and his values, which were not tied to virtuoso movement, rather they required dancers to be expressive (Meisner 2019). My point is that the movements from the *danse d'école* are effort actions, derived from verbs and not nouns, chosen by Petipa and linked to create the expressive features of the dance; the performance of the dancer needs to acknowledge this. In examining Petipa style, I used observations from some who had worked

²⁷ I am not suggesting that the dance steps cannot be performed with light and shade, but that, as Glasstone argues, the dance *enchaînements* are created for technical reasons and not for stylistic purposes.

with Petipa, Legat, Lopukhov, and from more recent British, Soviet and Russian critics and academics. What emerged was a belief that not only had the dances been altered to promote more virtuoso movement but also that their performance reflected those values. Lopukhov considered that changing the dances significantly affected Petipa's choreographic plan. He argued that, as a result, the dances are turned into academic studies, displaying the superiority of the dancers' technique rather than Petipa's style. This point was supported by Soviet comments that the dances had been improved, made more difficult, and were becoming more a tribute to Soviet training than anything to do with Petipa.

Performance traditions are linked to training styles and how dancers embody the movement of the era. A brief analysis of the 1940s English classroom training style demonstrated that dancers emerging from that training moved more rapidly, with more articulate feet. In earlier training, though the placing and positions had to be exact, there was less emphasis on turnout and leg height, and, consequently, earlier dancers had more freedom in the torso and were able to move swiftly. This approach seems to be closer to the values of Imperial Russia and draws attention to the more dynamic features of the steps. And, while technical exercises are not taught for their expressive properties, dancers embody their ideals which encourages them to move according to the tenets of the training.

Choreographers use the dancers' ways of moving as a basis for their dances. As Noll Hammond argues, training changes through time and consequently dancers move differently. But it is when the values of the dance are subservient to the training values that problems arise. Ballet training is complex and its relationship to performance has not been discussed or considered by the profession, at least not in writing. As is evident, nineteenth-century ballets which draw on the *danse d'école* do not require a simple translation of the steps, rather, they need to be understood as dance art and the expressive qualities inherent in the choreography given priority.

Finally, I analysed performances of the Princess Florine variation, dating from the 1930s, 1960s and 2000s. These showed how choreography can be misinterpreted. The Russian dancers today draw attention to technique, the biomechanical features of the dance, rather than to its expressive elements.²⁸ As a result, we are probably not seeing a Petipa dance. I am conscious that Alexi Ratmansky has reimagined *The Sleeping Beauty* and endeavoured to return to a style closer to that of the 1890s, which may be nearer to Petipa's choreography. Could this be the way forward? While the Ratmansky revivals are closer to the Stepanov notation and omit obviously virtuoso steps, the performances do not seem to have emphasised dynamic variation or speed and the dances are still slower than the earlier performances. They do restrict leg height and have softer, more fluent *port de bras*, making us less conscious of technical correctness.

I am not advocating a return to the past or even that we copy the past! Dancers of today just need to take account of style and choreographic intention and use the dynamic and expressive elements in performance rather than draw attention to correct technique. But the foregoing article demonstrates the difficulties of performing an earlier work and the relation between how the work is performed and what we are actually seeing is not obvious but, nevertheless, informs our experience of Petipa. Performance can be changed but the profession needs to reflect on the notion that art and technique are different things.

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²⁸ This is the case in today's Russian performances and in those by the Paris Opera and even in some of today's Royal Ballet. All can be seen on YouTube.

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